Castlemaine Naturalist

May 2022

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Black – chinned Honeyeater
photo by Kerrie Jennings

"The route ahead: from rarity to ?"

Ian Higgins outlines the future for our district's rare or restricted plant species.

Monthly meeting - Friday 8th April and Excursion, Saturday 9th April

by Jill Williams

Our guest speaker for the April monthly meeting was Ian Higgins, co-founder of 'Friends of Campbells Creek Landcare' group.

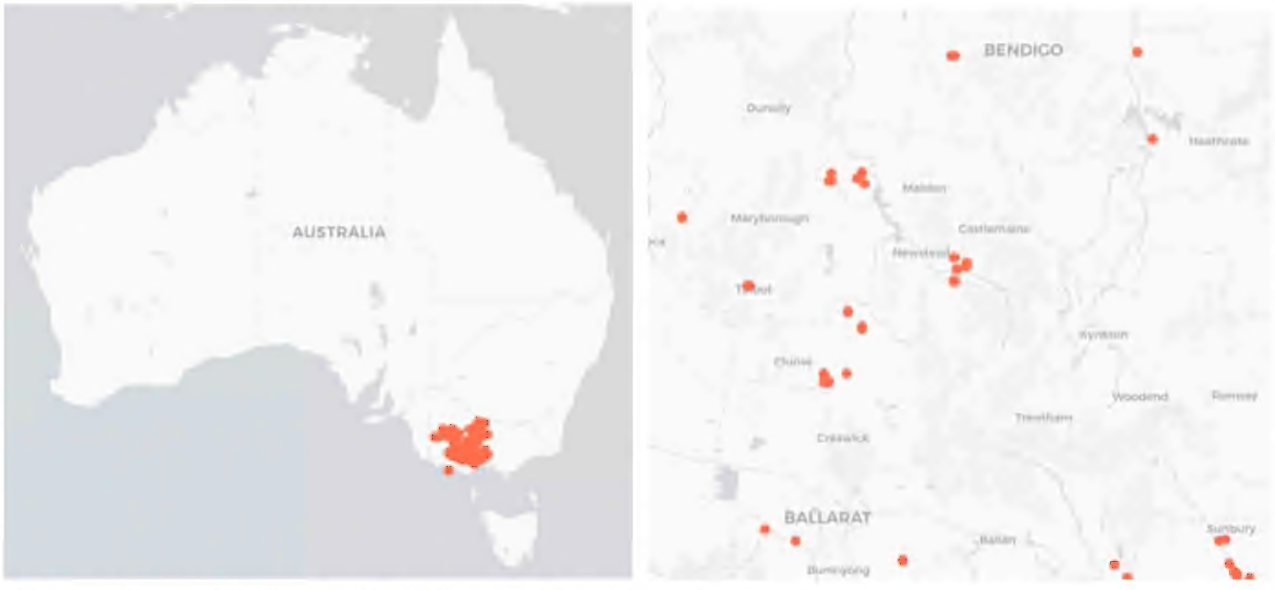
Ian began by summarizing some of the 2019 amendments to the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (FFG) which standardizes the categories of threat to species according to the national Common Assessment Method (CAM). These categories match the International Union for the Conversation of Nature (IUCN) Red List categories and criteria.

The new categories are: extinct, extinct in the wild, critically endangered, endangered, or vulnerable. The amendments combine the old FFG listing and the internal DELWP Advisory List as well as including species listed under the Commonwealth EPBC Act in a single State list of threatened species. DELWP has published it's "FFG Act 1988, Threatened List, October 2021" which lists 1300+ species as threatened.

For example, *Caladenia magnifica*, the Magnificent Spider Orchid, previously recorded from the Mt. Alexander region, is listed as extinct. This has happened 'on our watch!'

Using Ern Perkins' list "Wild Plants of the Castlemaine District" (Castlemaineflora.org.au) as a reference together with the 'Atlas of Living Australia' (ALA) and the 'Victorian Biodiversity Atlas' (VBA), Ian proceeded to list a collection of species from the Mt. Alexander area which are threatened in various ways.

A species could be listed nationally as critically endangered but close to locally extinct (in the Mt. Alexander area) such as the Spiny Rice flower, *Pimelea spinescens*.



Atlas of Living Australia – Occurrence map for *Pimelea spinescens subsp. spinescens*.

Left:
Pimelea spinescens, the Spiny Rice Flower (Photo 'chrisclarke25' iNaturalist Australia.)

Below:
In contrast, the Goldfields Stringybark, *Eucalyptus aurifodina* has only been recorded in the Mt. Alexander region – a hot spot.

Atlas of Living Australia – Occurrence map for *Eucalyptus aurifodina*

Many of the native legumes (Glycine sp.) are close to extinction as they were heavily grazed by the early pastoralists.

The millennium drought has forecasted the conditions to expect with climate change/warming which is happening now. Ian posed the question – 'Who is to take responsibility for this loss of biodiversity if not us?'

Ian then suggested several strategies to action, the first being the collection of seeds from these species at risk, before it is too late. This seed collection must be carried out with appropriate permits and must not cause significant depletion of seed availability for natural regeneration. The seeds could be propagated and then be planted in private gardens or on the well named 'nature strips'. However, it should be noted that generally the majority of these native species grow best in low nutrient soils. For example, the Common Rasp Fern (*Blechnum sp.*), is found in a basalt shaft between Guildford and Vaughan. Generally the local domestic soils have been significantly enriched. Once established, the plants need to be protected from grazing. Fencing can be the best protection.

Ian finished his presentation by suggesting that an action plan to achieve these outcomes needs to be produced. Together we should have the means and drive to achieve this.

Excursion

On the following Saturday afternoon, Ian met with 12 club members for a tour of the 'Wildflower restoration at Honeycomb Bushland Reserve' project site which is being maintained by the 'Friends of Campbells Creek' group.

In 2019, an area of about 20x20m was cleared of weeds (including the cursed Phalaris grass) and fenced. Within this enclosure, the group planted, many by direct seeding, a collection of plant species which are classified as threatened. Where available, the provenance of the seeds is recorded.

A successful planting has been *Grevillea dryophylla*, the Goldfields Grevillea which is now self-reproducing. It is graded as threatened as it only occurs naturally in north central Victoria. It is complemented with *Grevillea alpina*, the Downy Grevillea.

There are also some wonderful specimens of *Hakea decurrens* (Bushy Needlewood) and *Banksia marginata* (Silver Banksia).

Grevillea dryophylla. (Photo Geoff Lay, Vicflora web page)

Ian highlighted the different soil types and microclimates within the area, from the stoney shaley slopes, open grass fields thick with direct sown *Poa labillardierei* and an almost rainforest-like gully down in a deeper part of the creek.

In a second fenced-off site, the group is experimenting with both direct seeding and stock planting of *Themeda triandra*, Kangaroo Grass.

The excursion highlighted what has been achieved by the early and ongoing work by the Friends group to prevent further loss of threatened plant species. The results, positive and negative, will all allow further work to be even more successful.

SEANA in Portland

This year's Autumn SEANA (South East Australian Naturalist Association) weekend camp was held near Portland, organised by the Portland FNC from Friday 25th to Monday 28th March. The event was based at Portland Bay Lodge (PBL), Allestree, on the coast NE of the city. PBL, formerly a church camp, offers dormitory, cabin and camping accommodation with a central hall and kitchen for meals and talks. Most of the approximately 80 attendees stayed there, while some of us opted for nearby holiday rentals.

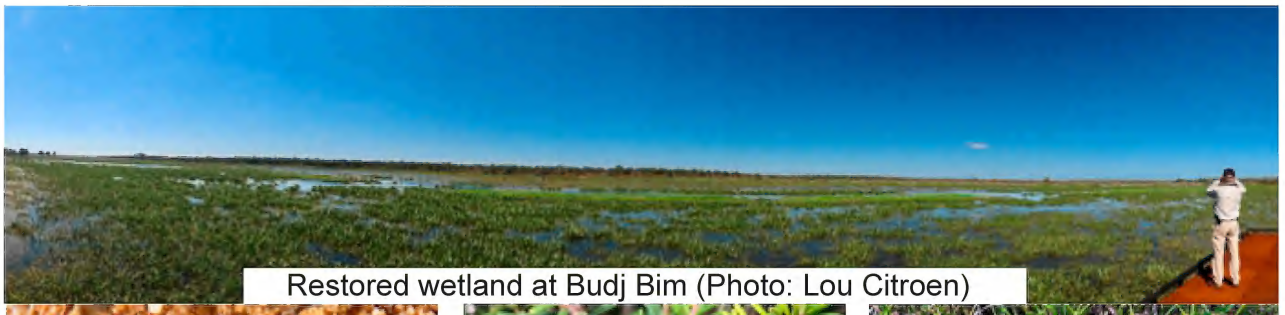
The program included 3 all-day excursions (1 on both the Saturday and Sunday) and 3 half day excursions on both days, plus a visit to Budj Bim World Heritage site on Saturday afternoon. In addition, maps and notes were provided for an extensive list of self-guided tours. Thirteen Castlemaine FNC members attended and between us we joined all but one of the excursions, plus some of the self-guided options.

Evening meals at the Lodge were catered, followed by talks by guest speakers. On Friday evening we heard from Gavin Prentice (Glenelg Hopkins CMA) on the development of the case for the Discovery Bay RAMSAR site, and the projects along the coast between Portland and Nelson – the most recent Australian RAMSAR site, gazetted in 2018 in recognition of the significance of the wetlands along Discovery Bay Coastal Park and Glenelg National Park. On Saturday the weekend's key-note speaker was Dr John Sherwood, from Deakin University's Warrnambool School of Life & Environment Sciences. His talk on Coastal Geology was outstanding – a history of the way the coasts have changed since the last Ice Age, and the implications for the future. The final event for this SEANA gathering was a video presentation by Martin Boyer, Riverkeeper and chair of Friends of the Surry. This was a revealing drone's eye view down the Surry River from the place where wool was washed on a major scale in the 1800s to the Pacific Highway, illustrating along the way major improvements by many landholders in protecting and revegetating the lands along the river.

Jenny Rolland and Euan Moore have provided reports on the all-day excursions on the Saturday to Cobboboonee National Park and to RAMSAR listed sites along Discovery Bay on the Sunday. On Saturday half the CFNC contingent joined the bird watching tour to Piccaninnie Ponds and Pick Swamp restored wetlands (see Ramsar Wetlands report below) led by Jeff and Sarah Campbell from Mt Gambier. The Campbells' expert knowledge of the birds in this area resulted in an excellent list for the day. The half-day excursions to see the heathland plants at Mt Clay, and to Surry River demonstrated other aspects of the natural and cultural history of this part of Victoria. The two hour Indigenous Cultural History tour around parts of the World Heritage site at Tae Rak (Lake Condah) was a highlight, with developments over the past year when some of us visited the area during Hamilton FNC's SEANA weekend.

Another memorable SEANA gathering ended as we left on the Monday morning, learning about a very different natural environment so different from our region and renewing friendships with FNC people from across the state. Congratulations to Vivien Holyoake and Ruth Graney and their team for a most successful weekend.

Peter Turner



Restored wetland at Budj Bim (Photo: Lou Citroen)

Drosere pygmaea at Mt Clay (Photo: Lou Citroen)

Banksia marginata and Wire Rush *Empodisma minus* - Mt Clay (Photos: Judy Hopley)

Left: Stringy's Tree - old Messmate Cobboboonee NP
Above: Restored wetland at Long Swamp (Photos: Euan Moore)

Australian Hobby (left), and Magpie Geese over Pick Swamp (Photos: Peter Turner)

Excursion Reports – Jenny Rolland and Euan Moore.

Cobboboonee NP

Our leader for our tour was Bob Hodgetts, a long-time resident of the area whose father was an early forester managing these forests. His extensive local knowledge added so much to this trip.

Bob started our tour with a visit to an old bullock watering point on a section of the Surrey River. We could still see the remains of the planks used to stabilise the sides of the water point and the stones that had been laid to reduce pugging by the animals as they went to the water to drink.

This was followed by a stop at Surrey Ridge picnic area where we walked the Hodgetts Loop Walk, named in honour of our leader's father who was instrumental in having this area protected. Lunch was at Jackass Fern Gully where a short walk from the picnic area led to a grove of tree ferns at the headwaters of the Fitzroy River, a small stream at this point. From here we started our return trip with a detour to look at some of the heathland that occurs on wet soils in the higher areas of the park. We did the Heathland Nature Walk, a loop through an area of heathland rising onto a stringybark ridge before returning to the cars through areas of tall heath.

Our final stop on the walk was to visit Stringy's Tree, a very large Messmate (Eucalyptus obliqua), named for Dick 'Stringy' Aldridge, a forester in the area during the mid 20th Century. This tree is several hundred years old and has survived a century or more of forest logging prior to this area becoming national park.

Ramsar Wetlands

The leader, Mark Bachmann from the Nature Glenelg Trust (NGT), met the group near the Long Swamp in Discovery Bay Coastal Park. Over a century ago, Long Swamp was drained to the ocean via a cutting through the sand dunes to facilitate grazing. This stopped the flow of water from the swamp into the oxbow lake at the mouth of the Glenelg River near Nelson.

In 2014 NGT in conjunction with Parks Victoria constructed a temporary dam across the artificial outlet using sandbags. This raised the water level in the swamp and allowed the benefits of the project to be assessed. In 2015 the final structure was put in place using some 7000 sandbags and geo-textile to hold the sand. This structure was later covered with sand and planted with local coastal shrub vegetation to create a 'natural' dune blocking the artificial outlet.

The raised water levels have restored the westward flow to the Glenelg and recreated Lake Bully, a small lake first mapped in 1850. The wetland vegetation is returning to the swamp, pushing back the encroaching coastal scrub that was invading the wetlands. Habitat for nationally threatened species such as Yarra Pygmy Perch (*Nannaperca obscura*) and Dwarf Galaxis (*Galaxiella pusilla*) has been increased while Australasian Bitterns (Critically Endangered) have returned to the swamp.

After a late lunch at Nelson the group crossed the South Australian Border to visit Pick Swamp. This wetland mirrors the swamps east of the Glenelg and like those

swamps used to flow into the Glenelg Estuary. Pick Swamp is part of the Piccaninny Ponds Conservation Park.

Since European settlement most of the karst wetlands in this area have been severely modified by drainage and clearing. This limits the extent to which wetland restoration is possible at present as some of the surrounding areas are still actively farmed and the original Freshwater Creek leading to the Glenelg Estuary has been covered by moving sand. The presence of the highly invasive Mosquito Fish (Gambusia sp.) in some of the wetlands means that full interconnection of the wetlands may not be desirable because of the impact of these fish on other aquatic fauna.

Water levels for the 130ha Pick Swamp have been restored creating habitat for threatened species similar to those at Long Swamp. As we stood on a levee bank at the western edge of the swamp, to one side there was a vibrant wetland with ducks, swans and Magpie Geese while several meters lower on the other side of the fence and drain was pasture on peat soils. Mark explained how, as the peat dried out and oxidised it lowered the ground level and released CO_2 into the atmosphere.

This was an extremely interesting day where the restoration of wetlands was shown to be practical and relatively straight forward once the hurdles of vested interest and conservatism within some parts of the community and government departments had been overcome.

Observations May 2022 (1944)

George Broadway

Specimens sent in by readers of “Wildlife” magazine in May 1944. In fact I guess they would have been sent earlier to be published in the May edition. Anyway, here they are. Which ones have you discovered ?

Firstly however, the editorial dealt with the severe soil erosion taking place in the Mallee. To begin with the Mallee had been over-settled after the first world war by returned servicemen and English migrants. Many men had enlisted and were not available to take countermeasures, and 1944 was a severe drought year. As a schoolboy I remember the huge dust clouds passing overhead at Warrnambool, where it was said that it was on its way to New Zealand, which was true. I also remember that on the way to school in the morning all the puddles were covered in ice, such cold being unusual for Warrnambool, typical of drought conditions.

So to the specimens:

Insects

Moorabbin: The small cocoons about the size of rice grains were the cocoons of tiny Braconid wasps. They are our friends because they are parasitic on the destructive Woolly Bear caterpillars which they kill before they reach the chrysalis stage and turn into an egg-laying moth. The adults resemble little black flies, but instead of only two wings, they have four.

Windsor : Black scale on Daphne. Use white oil emulsion, or weak boiled laundry starch which suffocates the insect and then peels off.

Carlton: A cockroach, occasionally a pest in houses. A mixture of equal parts of flour or sugar with plaster of paris left about on slips of paper or shallow dishes. A supply of drinking water should be left adjacent.

Box Hill: The white woolly substance on the stems of the paperbark was the woolly covering of the Melaleuca Mealy-bug, a sap-sucking insect allied to the scale insects. The white waxy threads are a covering which sheds rain and hides the creature from its enemies; beneath it can be found the small soft-bodied wingless insect.

Drung South: Fiddler beetle, see March issue

Elwood: The caterpillar with the little tufts of hair is the caterpillar of the Painted Apple moth, (first mentioned in Aug '18). Originally a pest of Wattle trees it has found apple trees to its liking.

Windsor: Caterpillar of the Mottled Cup Moth, *Doratifera*, commonly known as the Chinese Junk. Often mentioned, first Feb'18.

Essendon: The little creature (Denis- critter) was a baby stick insect, first. June '16. Can grow to about 30cm, but in Victoria 20 cm would seem to be the limit.

Moreland: Caterpillar from Bacchus Marsh, since turned into a chrysalis was of the Vine hawk Moth. See Feb '18.

Spiders

Thornbury: Orchard or Bird-dropping spider. Often sent in. First mention, May '17.

Gembrook: Beautifully constructed hiding place of a spider, probably *Saccodromus* or one of its allies. By various wiles, probably scent, they attract ants and beetles into their comfortable weather-proof parlours and then eat them. (Will you walk into my parlour, said the spider). Apparently no common name but McKeown has christened one of them "The Ogre of the Ants".

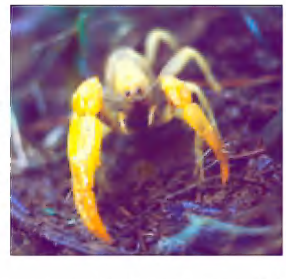
Glen Iris: Dark brown specimen of the common Orb-web or Cartwheel Web Spider. *Epeira productus*. See May '17. Varies in colour but is always recognizable by the shape of the body and the saw-tooth pattern on the back, designed to resemble the serrated edges of the leaves in which it may lurk. A beneficial spider, spending its evenings trapping many noxious insects.

Botanical

Rochester: Your strange spike of fragrant greenish flowers rising from a rosette of broad green leaves is *Eucomis punctata,* the Pineapple Lily, a native of South Africa. Eucomis means "Beautiful hair" and refers to the little tuft on the top of the flower spike, punctata means spotted and refers to the spots on the leaves.

Mirboo North: Thorn-apple, *Datura stramonium*, a noxious weed native of the Indies. It contains an alkaloid poisonous to stock and to human beings, Daturin. It is an annual and should be cut out before it has time to seed otherwise the seed will remain viable in the soil for many years.

General



Richmond: Little oval pearls of jelly found under the flowerpots were the eggs of the garden snail.

Elwood: The "crabs" were not true crabs but land yabbies, although they are nearly always called crabs in the country. They are actually small crayfish related to the freshwater crayfish. They cannot exist altogether without water and they burrow into the ground until they reach the water table and the ends of their burrows are always wet.

Kew; Your description tallies with that of the Mountain Devil lizard: it was probably brought back by someone who had been in the inland somewhere. They don't actually live in the mountains, their habitat is the dry interior where they feed mainly on ants.

Benalla: The skeleton was that of a small possum. The teeth are typical possum teeth and the claws are unusual only because they have been divested of fur so that they resemble those of a cat. Close examination however shows them to be typical possum claws.

Birds of Sutton Grange April 2022

Nigel Harland

Superb Fairy-wren	Red-browed Finch	White-browed Scrubwren
Australian Magpie	Australian Raven	Laughing Kookaburra
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Long-billed Corella
Crimson Rosella	New Holland Honeyeater	Welcome Swallow
Common Bronzewing	Red Wattlebird	Galah
Striated Pardalote	Grey Fantail	Grey Currawong
Spotted Pardalote	Eastern Rosella	Willy Wagtail
Grey Shrike-thrush	White-throated Treecreeper	Eurasian Blackbird

Very ordinary list this month, maybe they went away for Easter!

From your Committee

MEMBERSHIP FEES DUE

Membership subscriptions for 2022/23 are now due. (see page 12 for categories) Your completed membership form (available from the CFNC website) can be mailed with cheque to the club, or completed with details of direct payment into the CFNC account (details on the membership form), or scanned and mailed or emailed to castlemainefnc@hotmail.com

ROADSIDE CLEAN-UP – Monday May 16th

Your chance to help the Club do its regular Roadside Clean-up along a section of the Pyrenees Highway west of Castlemaine. It should take no more than a couple of hours.

Meet near Tait's Decorative Iron, Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine at 9am.

Garbage bags and red safety vests supplied. Wear sturdy footwear and bring your own gloves and water. Please contact Geoff Harris (mob 0418 392 183) if you can help with the clean-up.

Ant Lions

After nearly 60 years since leaving Mildura I still find myself looking hopefully at the ground as I walk half expecting to see the little conical pits in the soil which betray the presence of Ant lions. Adult Ant lions are winged insects in the group known as Lacewings, the Family Myrmeleontidae in the Order Neuroptera. A close relative is the Aphis lion which as the name suggests is a fierce predator on aphids. A common name for this insect is "The Old Clothes Man' because of its habit of attaching the sucked-out shells of the bodies of its victims to its back, presumably acting as a form of camouflage.

In the Mallee I would often come across these conical pits in the sandy soil indicating that at the bottom of the pit more or less buried under the sand except for a pair of formidable jaws protruding, there was an Ant lion larva waiting for the next victim/meal to approach. It was fascinating to watch when an unwary ant would approach, then to perhaps lose its footing on the edge of the pit, to find itself helplessly sliding down towards the waiting jaws at the bottom. If the hapless victim should show signs of escaping, the pit owner would flick grains of sand at it, causing it to lose its grip and fall back to its fate. It would be then dragged below the surface to have all the vital juices sucked out of it, leaving an empty shell which was then ejected to a suitable distance from the pit.

These insects are more often found in the warmer and drier parts of Australia; it would appear that the hard soils of Mt Alexander Shire are just not suitable for pit digging. But perhaps some of our readers may have seen some in this area.

I would be interested to hear whether you have. - George Broadway

Recent observations

Judy and Philip Hopley

We observed the fungi shown right on a Grey box, *Eucalyptus microcarpa*, in the Nuggetty area recently.

It may be Crepidotus 'mustard-yellow' (closest ID in Joy Clusker's "Fungi of the Bendigo Region").

Kerrie Jennings
Glycine Pea *Glycine tabacina*
Now rare; was probably widespread in pre-European grasslands.

Mez Woodward
Barred Skipper *Dispar compacta* (right)

Peter Turner

Left:
Golden Orb-weaver female with egg sac

Right:
Bardi moth (?)

COMING EVENTS

Monthly meeting: Friday 13 May, 7.30pm

Uniting Church Fellowship Room, Lyttleton Street

Our May monthly meeting will be held in person again. Members can arrive at the hall from 7.15pm and are welcome to stay after the meeting for supper and a chat. Please sign in on arrival.

Our guest speaker will follow the usual 'observations' session when members can share recent interesting sightings with an option to show a photo or two. If you have photos for the meeting, please email JPEG file(s) to Euan Moore at calamanthus5@bigpond.com by noon on the day of the meeting.

Speaker: Peter Jacobs, Deer Project Officer for the Invasive Species Council

"Feral deer - managing and monitoring"

Peter will talk about the emerging problem of feral deer in Victoria. The talk will discuss the identification and distribution of the 4 main feral deer species in Victoria, the economic, social and environmental impacts they are having and the cost to the community.

Peter will also present on Victoria's laws that protect feral deer as a game species and what strategic and tactical options there are for feral deer control in Victoria. This will include an overview of the control programs that are currently in place as well as what we need in the future to control this serious pest.

Excursion: Saturday 14 May 10am ALL DAY – "Seeding Victoria's seed bank", Creswick and La Gerche trail, Creswick SF

Seeding Victoria Inc. is a not for profit, charitable organisation that manages several seed banks in Victoria. For our May excursion, we will be privileged to have a tour of Seeding Victoria's seed bank at Creswick as recently featured in the ABC's Gardening Australia.

Dan Frost who manages this seed bank will explain how seed is appropriately sourced and maintained under strict conditions to supply revegetation projects. We will also learn how Seeding Victoria not only provides provenance-based seed sales but also a consultancy service for collection and caring for seed as well as site assessment and direct seeding advice.

The tour of the seed bank and discussion will take about 1.5 hours after which we will have a picnic lunch and a walk along the La Gerche Trail in the afternoon.

The **La Gerche Trail** is a 2.2 km long, easy walking track in the Creswick State Forest. The trail commemorates the work of John La Gerche, the first bailiff for the forest charged with halting the rampant cutting of trees for mining and fuel-wood and allowing regeneration of the forest. The trees planted by La Gerche are now over 100 years old and include a large variety, both native and introduced for experimental purposes. There are interpretative signs along the way.

Meet: Meet at the Octopus (Duke St, opposite the Castle Motel) at **10am** or at the Seed Bank, co-located with the Parks Vic complex in Sawpit Rd Creswick at **10.50am**. We will meet at the old oak tree in the gardens near the Seed Bank.

Bring: lunch, chairs, sturdy shoes and water.

The Field Trip will be cancelled in extreme weather conditions or if there is a high fire risk.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

PROGRAM

Due to the easing of COVID restrictions, our May monthly meeting will be held in person in the Fellowship Room of the Uniting Church Hall, Lyttleton St., commencing at 7.30pm (access from 7.15pm). For the winter months, June-August, we will use Zoom again for the convenience of members.

Our guest speaker will follow the usual 'observations' session when members can share recent interesting sightings with an option to show a photo or two. If you have photos for the meeting, please email JPEG file(s) to Euan Moore at calamanthus5@bigpond.com by noon on the day of the meeting.

Excursions will be held on the Saturday after the monthly meeting. Meet at the Octopus (opposite the motel in Duke St) for departure at 1.30pm unless otherwise advised.

Fri May 13 Meeting: Speaker – Peter Jacobs (Invasive Species Council) "Feral deer - managing and monitoring."

Sat May 14 Excursion ALL DAY: 10am "Seeding Victoria's seed bank", Creswick and the La Gerche walk, Creswick SF.

Mon May 16: **Roadside Clean-up** 9am Tait's Decorative Iron, Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine

Fri Jun 10 Meeting: Speaker – Scarlett Howard (Deakin University) "Bees and their ability to learn".

Sat Jun 11 Excursion: 1.30pm "Mosses" with Cassia Read, Clinkers Hill Reserve.

Fri July 8 Meeting: Speaker – Melinda Waterman (Uni. of Wollongong) "Antarctic mosses".

Club website (Web master: Ron Wescott) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Castlemaine Naturalist - email newsletter material to: newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com

*Deadline for the June edition is May 27.

Subscriptions for 2022

Ordinary membership: Single $35, Family $50
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2022 Committee

President:	Peter Turner	5470 6891
Vice President:	Euan Moore	0407 519 091
Secretary:	Jenny Rolland	0400 565 092
Treasurer:	Geoff Harris	0418 392183
Editors:	Jenny Rolland	Noel Young 5472 1345
Committee:	George Broadway	5472 2513
	Cathrine Harboe-Ree	0438 366 674
	Judith Nimmo	0419 386 015
	Jill Williams	0437 751 824

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.
Inc #A0003010B